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THE RESTLESS ENERGY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE—AN IMPRESSION.

BY IAN MACLAREN (THE REV. JOHN WATSON, D.D.).

MANY Americans were good enough to call upon me before I had the pleasure of visiting their country, and many Americans have called since, and no American ever does me this honor without charging the very atmosphere of my study with oxygen, and leaving an impression of activity which quickens my slow pulses and almost reduces me to despair.

It is now several years ago that a tall, thin, alert man followed his card into my study with such rapidity that I had barely time to read it before my visitor was in the room.

"My name is Elijah K. Higgins and I am a busy man. You are also busy and have no time to fool away. Four days is all I can give to the United Kingdom, and I wished to shake hands with you. Good-bye, I am off to Drumtochty."

I calculate that Mr. Higgins spent thirty seconds in my study, and left the room so swiftly that I overtook him only at the front door. When I asked him if he knew where Drumtochty was, "Guess I do!" he said. "Got the route in my pocket, northwest from Perth, N. B.," and in two seconds more he was whirling away in a fast hansom. As I returned to my study and imagined my visitor compassing Great Britain (I think he excluded Ireland, but I am not certain) in four days, I was for a moment roused from the state of comparative lethargy which we, in England, call work, and added six more engagements to my afternoon's programme. For days afterwards, and as often as I was tempted to rest in my chair, the remembrance of that whirlwind gave me a shock of new vigor. Sometimes a reaction would follow, and I humbly thanked Providence, although that was to write

myself a weakling and a sluggard, that I was not born in the country where Mr. Higgins lived and moved and was at home.

A year earlier, I had been dodging among the Greek Islands in an Italian cargo boat, which was good enough to take passengers, but whose bows had been staved in by a collision. We did not go out to the open when the sea was rough, but we called at any port where we could obtain cargo. We took our meals when we pleased, and had no idea when we should reach our destination. It was a calm voyage where there was no commotion either of mind or body, and then our little pool was lashed into a tempest by the arrival of a new passenger. He came when we were ashore, and ere we returned he had already changed the whole aspect of the ship. The crew had ceased to sleep in picturesque attitudes on the deck, and were explaining him to one another with the aid of gesticulations and many a "*per Baccho*." The captain was listening to him with unaffected interest, and was evidently much impressed by the eloquence of his new passenger, although he did not understand a single word he said. Our steward, the most leisurely of men, who served a meal only when he was hungry himself, had ceased to smoke, and passed us at a swift walk with a couple of dishes. And I began to understand the situation when I heard what the latest arrival was saying to the captain: "Yes, Cap, you had better hustle and keep on schedule time, or else we will miss the connection at Brindisi."

As he found the Italians uninteresting, as well as unenterprising, he gave us the most of his company, and, as the Scotch woman said about the sermon, it was both "edifying and diverting." He was just returning from a visit to the Holy Land, and it had not "filled the bill," so far as I could make out; he had traversed the whole country in fourteen days and eight hours from ship to ship; and I fancy that if any other person required forty days, he really had done it in fourteen, using no doubt a swift dromedary, and travelling both by night and day. He frankly confessed, however, that his visit had been a disappointment and his trouble had been without gain. Palestine, to my American friend, showed an immense want of activity, and cried aloud for the application of American brains and capital. Jerusalem, in especial, had been a painful surprise, for he had expected great things; and he assured me that its condition was beyond belief.

"They may say what they like about Jerusalem, but it is a back number. As I am a white man, there's not a trolley-car nor a daily newspaper in the whole place. What Jerusalem wants is a few hustlers from the West. I guess they would show the old place a razzle-dazzle," and my American friend looked far away, as if he saw already the new companies and industries, and speculations of his compatriots in the city of David.

A year ago I was staying in a villa on the Riviera, and a new guest arrived. He had come from America as rapidly as the swiftest ship and through express could carry him, and he was going back again in a week. Had he come for the voyage, or for the Riviera, or to pay a visit of friendship, or to see a picture? Not at all. A workman in the huge mills of which he was manager had discovered the means of doubling the producing power of a piece of machinery. As soon as the invention had been verified, the manager started for Europe to see his partners, and to arrange to spend £100,000 in applying the invention to new machinery. It would save the labor of, say, 50 men, and yet 100 more men would be needed in the works, because such an invention would enable the firm to secure larger contracts. Never in my life have I met a man who impressed a stranger with such a sense of alert intellect and unwearied activity. He thought of nothing, and read about nothing, and spoke about nothing, and dreamed about nothing, and one might add, with one or two reservations, he cared about nothing, except his article of manufacture, which we shall call for the moment aluminium plates. There was no question about these plates which he had not anticipated and could not answer. The sources of aluminium and its value, its constituents, and its combinations, its methods of treatment, and its practical uses, all this he knew up and down, through and through, past and present, and altogether. He could reason with much acuteness on the burning questions of aluminium, he read extensively, and generally had a book in his hand on aluminium plates; he had a highly trained and exuberant imagination on the future of aluminium. Times there were when he even drifted into sentiment, on the service which aluminium had rendered to the human race. It was a joy to meet a man who knew something thoroughly and believed in something utterly, and one felt that, if one had aluminium works, one would like to have my friend Hartmann for manager. Occasionally, he was good enough

to give me his idea of English manufacturers and machinery (aluminium of course—it is doubtful whether he had heard we manufactured anything else), and he regarded our condition with great concern. He had himself been offered a managership of large English mills and laid down his conditions. The owners must be prepared to put in new machinery every ten years, at the cost of a quarter of a million, and they must clear all union men out of the works. With machinery always up to date and high class workmen, unfettered by any rule of restricted labor, he was of opinion that he could have shown some result that would astonish aluminium circles in England.

“I would have given them,” he said, “a good show for their money; but there wasn’t sand enough in them to stand the racket; they weakened at the thought of the Unions and the risk of their money.”

When I looked at Mr. Hartmann, I was certain he would weaken at nothing, either terror of man or expenditure of money; and I gathered inspiration and something approaching activity from his society. If you were willing to sit with him, he would talk till midnight on his subject, which he invested with a fascinating interest by his wealth of information and brilliant speculations; and if you had looked out at your window at six o’clock next morning you would have seen Mr. Hartmann pacing the grounds with a rapid nervous step. Sometimes, he would stop to write something in his note-book, or he might even sit down to make a calculation in a basket chair intended to shelter invalids from the wind. An idea had entered his mind about the treatment of aluminium, which in nine days he would test in a laboratory at Carthagena, Ill.; or he had seen a way of reducing the terms of a contract. When you saw Mr. Hartmann—who was as impervious to disease as one of his aluminium plates, and to whom every form of invalidism was quite incomprehensible—sitting in a basket chair, you had an agreeable sense of contrast, and a flavor of humor.

Such lively experiences, which I often recall in jaded moments, prepare one for a visit or a re-visit to America, as a tonic gives a sluggish person an appetite for dinner, and it is bare justice to say that one’s expectations of American energy in its own home have not been disappointed. If Americans, depressed by our heavy climate and our leisurely life, could yet maintain such a level of

thought and motion, what might not be possible to them in their own country, where the atmosphere is charged with electricity, and every second man is a "hustler from way-back." The stir of the New World affects the visitor and quickens his pulses as he goes up the Hudson and gets his first glimpse of New York. Your steamer had waited four hours at Queenstown for the mails, but the same mails were transferred to the United States tender as the steamer went up the bay. It is said that some day one of the great railway companies whose connections are broken by the Mersey, will utilize the underground tunnel for goods trains; but on the Hudson you see huge ferry-boats conveying across the river the freight trains of the Pennsylvania Railway Company. Little tugs dart about on all sides with feverish speed, and larger steamers pass with their upper machinery indecently exposed, as if there had not been time, or it had not been worth while, to cover it. Buildings of incredible height line the shores, and suggest that the American nation, besides utilizing the ground, proposes also to employ the heavens for commercial purposes. It was, I think, a Texas paper which translated the austere saying, "*Per aspera ad astra*," into "the hustler gets to heaven," and certain New York builders seem now to be on the way. Whetted by this overture on the river, one is ready for the full music of the city; and I wish to pay the compliment with all honesty, that New York, with the possible exception of Chicago, is the activest and noisiest place I have ever seen, or expect to see in this present world. While an English merchant saunters down to his office between nine and ten, a New York man rises at half past six in his suburb and is busy at work at eight o'clock. The Englishman takes off an hour during the day for luncheon at his club, while the American eats his meal in fifteen minutes. The Englishman spends more than another hour at afternoon tea, and gossip with friends, and sauntering about between his club and his office, while the American packs every minute with work. The very walk of an English merchant, slow, dignified, self-satisfied, and that of the American, rapid, eager, anxious—the one looking as if time were of no importance nor circumstances, and the other as if the loss of a minute might mean ruin—are the visible indices to the character of the nations. It is only yesterday that elevators were introduced into English city buildings, and there are many London offices to which you still have to make an Alpine ascent of four

stairs; but a New Yorker regards a stair as a survival of barbarism, and hardly knows how to use it. The higher buildings have several sets of elevators, like the four tracks which railways lay down to work the swift and slow traffic.

"Don't go in there," my friend said, with whom I was going to lunch at a club on the top floor of a many-storied New York building. "That's an accommodation elevator; stops, you know, at every station. This is the express for the top floor."

"Would it have made much difference?" I said.

"Very nearly a minute," as if the loss of the minute would have thrown us back for the rest of the day.

No man goes slow if he has the chance of going fast, no man stops to talk if he can talk walking, no man walks if he can ride in a trolley car, no one goes in a trolley car if he can get a convenient steam car, and by and by no one will go in a steam car if he can be shot through a pneumatic tube. No one writes with his own hand if he can dictate to a stenographer, no one dictates if he can telegraph, no one telegraphs if he can telephone, and by and by when the spirit of American invention has brought wireless telegraphy into thorough condition, a man will simply sit with his mouth at one hole and his ear at another, and do business with the ends of the earth in a few seconds, which the same machine will copy and preserve in letter books and ledgers. It is the American's regret that at present he can do nothing with his feet while he is listening at the telephone, but, doubtless, some employment will be found for them in the coming age.

If a slow-witted and slow-moving Englishman desires a liberal education, let him take a journey of a month on the steam cars in the United States. No train in Europe travels as fast as certain American expresses, and if other trains go slower it is a matter of thankfulness, because they are less likely to kill passengers on level crossings, or in the main streets of the city along which they take their way, and cattle have more time to get off the unprotected tracks. As trains have also a trick of jumping the rails, either through the rails spreading or the eccentricity of the engine, both being instances of exuberant national vitality, it is just as well that every express does not go at the rate of the Empire State Express on the New York Central. Nowhere in Europe can a traveller find stronger or handsomer cars, and they are marvels of adaptability and convenience. There is a dining car, in order

that you may not lose time at a station, and also, which is not unimportant, in order that you may be able to occupy your time with something practical on the train. Of course, there is a smoking compartment, where men can compare notes upon politics and business, and be able to escape from idleness and themselves. The best expresses have a reading car, where the American can pick up such morsels of information from the magazines as he can contain between the interstices of business. There is a desk where he can read his letters, and a typewriter to answer them, for this train is the American's sleeping-place and dining-place, and his home and his office. One thing only he regrets; the train, as it flies along, is not connected with the telegraph and the telephone, so that, as an idea occurs to him or he obtains a hint from a man in the smoking car, he might be able to do business with his correspondents in Chicago or San Francisco. While an Englishman on a railway journey is generally dressed in rough and loosely fitting tweeds, suggestive of a country life and of sport, the coat of his American cousin is of dark material and has not a superfluous inch of cloth. From his collar to his neat little boot the American is prim, spick-and-span, and looks as if he had come out of a band-box and were ready to appear in the principal room of any office. He is dressed in fact for business, and looks like business from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet, while an Englishman's appearance suggests that he is going to see a cricket match or that he has retired to live upon a farm.

My countryman arrives at the station with two and a half minutes to spare, and laden with small baggage. A porter carries his rug and an ulster, very likely also a hat-box and a bag with books, papers, and such like in it, to say nothing of an umbrella and a mackintosh, and he secures his seat at the last moment. He fastens his hat above his head, puts on a travelling cap, changes into an ulster, if it be winter time, and throws a rug over his knee; he puts on travelling gloves, and gets out the *Times*, and he will sit without budging and read his *Times* without intermission for fifty minutes. Besides these trifles with him in the carriage, he has a portmanteau in the van, which he hopes has been addressed, and which the porter promised to see put in, and he will scramble for it at his terminus along with a hundred other passengers, who are all trying to identify and extricate their luggage from a huge heap on the platform.

The American reaches the depot by a trolley car fifteen minutes at least before the hour of departure, having sent his heavy luggage, if he has any—which is not likely—by baggage express. His only personal equipment is a slim and compact valise, which, in regard to opening and shutting, is a marvel of convenience. This he carries in his hand, and places beneath or beside the seat which he has secured two days before. He does not carry a rug because the cars are heated, nor an umbrella because it is not the rainy season. His top coat he hangs up beside his seat, as if he were in his own house; and his hat if he so please. He does not wear a travelling cap any more than in his own drawing-room, nor gloves in the train any more than in his own office. Should his hands be soiled, he goes to the lavatory where there are large basins and an ample supply of water, and if his coat be dusty, there is a negro porter in every car to brush it. The immense repose of the English traveller is quite impossible for this mercurial man, whose blood and whose brain are ever on a stir. Very rarely will you see him reading a book, because he is not accustomed to read, and the demands of a book would lessen his time for business meditation. Boys with newspapers circulate through the cars, and he buys each new paper as it appears at the different towns. Whether it be Republican, or Democratic, or a family paper or a yellow journal, does not matter to him; he glances at the startling headings, takes an accident or a political scandal at a mouthful, skims over the business news, sees whether anything has happened at the Philippines, notes that the canard of the morning has been contradicted in the afternoon, and flings paper after paper on the floor. Three minutes or, in cases of extreme interest, five minutes suffice for each paper, and by and by this omnivorous reader, who consumes a paper even more quickly than his food, is knee deep in printed information or sensation. For two minutes, he is almost quiet, and seems to be digesting some piece of commercial information. He then rises hurriedly, as if he had been called on the telephone, and makes for the smoking car, where he will discuss "Expansion" with vivid, picturesque speech, and get through a cigar with incredible celerity. Within fifteen minutes he is in the sleeper again; and, a little afterwards, wearying of idleness, he is chewing the end of a cigar, which is a substitute for smoking and saves him from being wearied with his own company. Half an hour before the train is due at his station, he is being

brushed, and getting ready to alight. Before the train has reached the outskirts of the town, he has secured his place in a procession which stands in single file in the narrow exit passage from the sleeper. Each man is ready dressed for business and has his valise in his hand; he is counting the minutes before he can alight, and is envying the man at the head of the procession, who will have a start of about two seconds. This will give him a great advantage in business, and he may never be overtaken by his competitors till evening.

Suppose he lands at 6 a. m., he will find breakfast ready in a hotel, and half a dozen men eating as if their lives depended upon finishing by 6.15 a. m. Before seven he will have disposed of a pile of letters, dictating answers to a typist attached to the hotel, he will have telegraphed in all directions, and made half a dozen appointments in the town by telephone. Within the forenoon he will finish his business and depart for some neighboring town, lunching on the cars. The second town he will dispose of in the afternoon, and that evening go on board the sleeper to travel 400 miles to a third town, where he is going to negotiate a contract at 8 o'clock next morning. If you sympathize with him, and wonder how flesh and blood can stand the speed, he accepts your sympathy as a compliment, and assures you that he never sleeps so well as on the cars. He never seems to be out of sorts or out of temper: he is always thoroughly alive and quite good-natured. Sometimes he may seem for a moment annoyed, when he cannot telegraph as often as he wants along the line, or when the train is not on time, that he may make a connection. Nothing would wound him so deeply as to "get left," and he can only affect to be unconscious when someone declares that he is "no slouch, and that there are no flies on him." If he is obliged to spend two hours doing nothing in a hotel, when business is over, then he rocks himself and smokes, and it is a wonderful spectacle for an indolent Englishman to look down from the gallery that commands the hall of the hotel, and to see fifty able-bodied fellow men who have worked already twelve hours, at least, and put eighteen hours' work into the time, all in motion. (One wonders why this motion is not utilized to drive something.) He discovers how unlike cousins may be, for he never moves unless he is obliged to or unless he wants to shoot something, and these remarkable men never rest unless when they are asleep. About that even, I

am not sure, and I was often tempted to draw aside the curtain from a berth in a sleeping car, and, had I done so, I should not have been at all surprised to find our friend wide awake with a cold cigar in his cheek, and rocking his knees for want of more extensive accommodation. He has always rebelled against the ancient custom of sleep, which he regards as a loss of time and an anachronism. All that he can do is to spend the night in a sleeping car, which, as he will tell you, annihilates time and space.

Foreigners travelling in the States in their innocence are amazed that a delicate-minded nation, like the Americans, should be willing to sleep after the fashion of the Pullman cars, and should not insist upon the Continental cabin-car. The reason for the Arcadian simplicity of the sections is not really economy, for no American would ever think twice of spending a dollar; it is simply their abounding and dominant energy. If you sleep in cabins at night, you must sit in cabins by day; and this would mean a seclusion and repose which are very distasteful to the high-strung American temperament. It would be like bottling up a volatile gas; and one might almost think it might lead to an explosion, which some day would break down the partitions and break up the car from end to end. The American must see everything in his car and hear everything, for which he depends upon the peculiar quality of the local voice; and he must be at liberty to prowls about his car, and to sit with his friends here and there. The car is his little world for the time, and he is not going to live in a backwater.

There seems no doubt that an American workman will do from twenty-five to thirty-three per cent. more than an Englishman in the same time, and that the higher wages of the American have their compensation for the capitalist in a workman's quickness of mind and sleight of hand. Everything goes at an accelerated speed, with wonderful inventions in labor saving machinery and devices to economize time. If the great end of a nation be to do as much as possible in as short a time as possible, then the American climate has been practically arranged for that end. An Englishwoman living in the States becomes effervescent, and the native American is the brightest woman on the face of the earth. While the English atmosphere is heavy and soothing, and lends itself to thought and quietness, the American climate is exciting

and exhilarating, and quickens both mind and body to the highest activity. It is an electric climate, and the electricity has passed into the people, who are simply vessels charged up to a certain number of volts. These vessels as sources of motive power can then be attached to pulpits, or offices, or workshops or politics. Of course, a day will come when the vessels will have been completely discharged, and that day arrives very frequently without warning. A little confusion in the head, and a slight numbness in the limbs, and the man has to go away a year to Colorado Springs or to Los Angeles. If he is fortunate, he can be recharged and run for another five or ten years; then nature does not give any warning, but simply stops the heart or darkens the brain, and you must get another man.

No one, unless he leaves the country or becomes a crank, can escape from this despotism of activity; he is part of the regiment and must march with his fellows. The idea of making a competency and then retiring, say, into the country, never crosses a man's mind. When you urge economy upon a man for this end, you have injured your case, and are pleading on the other side. With such a prospect before him, he is more than ever resolved to be a spendthrift. To seclude an active American in an old-fashioned country house, with ivy climbing round its Tudor windows, even although there should be a library of black oak inside and a rose garden outside, would be cruelty; it would be to imprison a squirrel in a golden cage. What greatly impresses the traveller in the United States is that the rich men work as hard and as long as the poor, and that they cannot even give attention to the affairs of their country, but are willing to leave them to the very doubtful management of the "Boss," because it would not pay them to leave their business and go into politics. If the end of life be riches, then a clever American is a successful man, for in no country does a respectable man become so very rich, or rich so soon, and if not respectable he still may do fairly well. You cannot have everything, however, and one notes that the average rich man has paid a price for his dollars. He has read very little—his wife reads for him; he has travelled very little—his daughters travel for him. He has no voice in the State—professional politicians speak for him; he has no amusements, unless you include speculation; and he has no pleasant periods of rest, unless you accept as an equivalent comparatively early and sudden death,

which often arises from acute indigestion. He has not time to stop and realize himself, unless, but this is a large exception, when he has dyspepsia. One reason, perhaps, why Americans do not rest is that given to me by a bright woman: "We are all so tired," and the American is the victim of his own qualities.

One, of course, acknowledges the advantages of this amazing energy, and there are times when a stolid Englishman grows envious. A university in America is created in ten years and endowed to the extent of millions sterling, and equipped with chairs of which a European never dreamt, and laboratories which border upon palaces. Libraries and picture galleries are rising in every city, for which the treasuries of Europe have been ransacked; and, were it not for the restriction of governments, the Old Masters would have to be sought, not in Italy and England, but in New York and Chicago. New towns are designed upon a scale of magnificence, as if each were to be the capital of an empire, and are at least outlined in building within a few years. Should it be necessary, an army can be created within a few months, and in a couple of years a new trade can be established which will kill its European rivals. An English farmer with fifteen hundred acres is a considerable man, but an American can have fifteen thousand acres and his different farm buildings will be connected by telephone. A self-made man in England marries his daughter to a baronet and is much lifted; but the daughter of a self-made man in America will marry an English duke, and consider she has conferred a benefit. When you go to a Western town, you may be taken to see a university; if not, you are taken to a dry-goods store; each, in its own way, is the largest of its kind. Certainly, there are stores in America which have no rival in the Old World, and which you are expected to visit with the same appreciation as the Duomo of Florence.

There is almost nothing that the United States does not possess, except political purity, and nothing which an American cannot do, except rest; and in the conflict with foreign competition, he has almost discounted victory. Whether he be able, that is, patient and thorough in the discovery of principles, may be a question; that he is clever, by which one means bright and ingenious in turning principles to account, is beyond all question. If America has not yet had time to produce a Lord Kelvin, it has given us telephones; and if Professor Dewar has astonished the

world with his liquid air, an American trust is, it is said, being formed to handle it for commercial purposes. If we are thought to be dull and slow, as we travel among the most stimulating and hospitable people on the face of the earth, let some excuse be made for us and let our hosts share the blame. An Englishman in the United States is half dazed, like one moving amid the ceaseless din and whirling wheels of a huge manufactory, where the voice has to be raised to a shriek, and a sentence compressed into a single word. He goes home greatly humbled in his estimation of himself, and in low spirits about the commercial future of his country. He has no bitterness, however, within his heart, for are not these people of his own blood, and are not their triumphs his, even if they threaten to outrun his own nation in the race of productive commerce? And when he comes back to England, has he not his compensations, Stratford-on-Avon, and Westminster Abbey, and the greenery of the Home Counties, and the lights and shadows of the Scots Lochs, and the musical voices of the English women, and the quiet, contented, cultured English homes?

IAN MACLAREN.